



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Ruth Johnson Colvin

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Women of
DISTINCTION
HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

Ruth Johnson Colvin

Ruth Johnson Colvin is a literacy pioneer. A native of Chicago, Illinois, she moved to Syracuse in 1940 and earned her Bachelor of Science in Business from Syracuse University in 1959.

In 1961, after learning that more than 11,000 people in the Syracuse community were “functionally illiterate,” Ms. Colvin took a proactive approach and began working with professional reading specialists to develop tutor training and instructional materials. In 1962, Ms. Colvin founded Literacy Volunteers. Now known as LiteracyCNY, this non-profit

organization provides adults in the Central New York community with the literacy tools and instruction they need to learn English.

With Ms. Colvin's guidance, the literacy volunteer movement quickly spread across the United States; the national organization, Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc., was incorporated in 1972. Over the course of 50 years, Ms. Colvin and her husband, Robert, traveled the world to provide literacy training in more than 60 different countries. Today, Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. offers more than 330 programs in 42 states, with more than 100,000 volunteers and students.

In 1987, Ms. Colvin was recognized with the highest volunteerism award in the United States, the President's Volunteer Action Award. In 1993, she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame, and in 2006, she received the prestigious Presidential Medal of Freedom. Ms. Colvin has also received nine honorary degrees and more than 20 other local and national awards, and has published several works, including *O the Beaten Path: Stories of People Around the World* (2011).

In 2002, ProLiteracy was formed when Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. merged with Laubach Literacy International. Ms. Colvin continues as an active volunteer tutor and life member of the ProLiteracy and LiteracyCNY board of directors and has started literacy programs in Madagascar and Papua, New Guinea. In 2010, the Ruth J. Colvin Center was created and named after her, aimed at increasing the abilities of Central New Yorkers with limited literacy skills.

Ms. Colvin enjoys spending time with her two adult children, six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. She reads and exercises every day, and still enjoys playing 18 holes of golf when she can – at almost 100 years young!